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**WASHINGTON, DC - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (MD) delivered the [opening statement](#) <sup>1</sup> of general debate today on the Affordable Health Care for America Act. Below are his remarks as prepared for delivery:**

Click here to watch Leader Hoyer's opening statement

"Soon, each one of us is going to look into his or her conscience and vote on this bill. And when the time comes, I don't know if any words of mine will sway you. But I know that the most powerful arguments for this bill aren't being spoken on this floor-they are being lived, right now.

"In the anxiety of the family that finds itself paying more and more each year for health insurance that grows weaker and weaker.

"In the frustration of the small business owner weighing the choice of dropping her employees' coverage against the threat of being driven out of business by her competitors.

"And in the fury of the patient who learns that an insurance company bureaucrat has deemed him too sick for the coverage he paid for.

"They are our families, our neighbors, our fellow citizens. They are waiting for health insurance reform that is more affordable, more secure, more just. Their stories will be with me when I vote.

"Because I want to say to every American facing down illness: never again will you be denied coverage because you have diabetes or asthma, or because you are pregnant, or because you have anything else your insurer decides is a 'pre-existing condition.' Never again will your coverage run out-nor will you find that coverage you thought you paid for was actually not there at all. And never again can insurance companies drive out competition and set premiums as high as they like-because there will be a public insurance option and a transparent marketplace to keep them honest.

"I want to say to our middle-class families: you will have coverage you can depend on. Even if you change your job, or lose your job, or decide to start a business, you'll be able to find affordable coverage in a competitive marketplace-an Insurance Exchange that offers you a choice of good policies at fair rates. In fact, according to an MIT analysis, buying coverage on the Exchange will bring your premiums down by a great deal, even without affordability credits. If your family makes \$90,000, you'll save more than \$1,200 each year. If your family makes \$60,000, you'll save more than \$5,000. And if your family makes \$38,000, you'll save more than \$9,000.

"I want to say to our seniors: you count on Medicare, on a federal program, for dignity and peace of mind in your golden years, and that won't change. Today we will vote to protect your access to your doctor, to encourage Medicare physicians to cooperate on higher-quality care, to keep your Medicare solvent for longer, and to bring an end to the 'donut hole' that leaves prescription drugs unaffordable for so many.

"I want to say to our small businessmen and -women: I know your premiums keep going up, and that each year they make it harder to stay in business, to compete with big business and with foreign firms. You deserve a fair playing field-and in the Insurance Exchange marketplace, you'll be able to buy coverage at the low group rates you've been denied.

"I want to say to the 35 million Americans without insurance, who are forced to skip check-ups and preventive care, who are forced to turn to the ER as the first and only line of defense, who live sicker and shorter lives: you will have what every man, woman, and child has, in every other industrialized country in the world-health coverage you can afford and that you can count on.

"And to every American who is rightly worried about our mounting deficits and debt, I can tell you this: this bill does not add to the deficit over the next ten years, and is likely to reduce deficits further in the next decade. This bill means health care that is more fiscally sustainable, for years to come.

"That is what this bill, the Affordable Health Care for America Act, can achieve for our country. It isn't a simple bill. It isn't a perfect bill. But it is the product of months and months of debate and scrutiny-and it is the right response to this time of economic insecurity in which we have been called to lead.

"If we miss this chance-or if we vote for a Republican plan that does nothing to expand coverage, weakens insurance for millions who have it, and continues to allow millions of Americans to be denied affordable coverage-we will find ourselves back here again.

"But by then, premiums will eat up even more of our families' budgets; health care will consume even more of our economy; and even more Americans will have died needlessly. If we miss this chance, this challenge of nearly a century's duration will go on haunting us.

"And the years between this chance and our next one will be filled with stories that are unworthy of America at its best. Stories like Linda's, who wrote to the New York Times of the anguish she felt, suffering from abdominal cancer and standing in the hospital just feet away from the drugs that could help save her life-drugs her insurance company was denying her.

"Stories like Deamonte Driver's, a 12-year-old boy from Maryland who died when bacteria spread from a tooth abscess to his brain-who died for a lack of access to the dental care he needed, a lack of \$80 to get that tooth pulled.

"We can be better than that. We must be. Americans rightly want to know what's in this bill for them-but there is also something important in this bill for us, as a people. A system worthy of the values we profess and the principles we hold dear.

"We will vote for a healthier America. We will vote to give our fellow citizens a greater sense of security. We will vote to make Medicare stronger for our seniors. We will vote for a healthier economy, for affordable coverage for individuals and small businesses. We will vote to begin containing costs, which will otherwise be unsustainable for our children and grandchildren. We will, in sum, vote for that more perfect union of which our Founders dreamed.

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